

Economic Development

Grandin Court's economic activity is focused along Brambleton Avenue (U.S. Route 221). Brambleton Avenue has a variety of commerce and is a strong commuter route from adjoining Roanoke County into the city. Vacancies in this area do not last long as new establishments continue to replace outgoing ones.



The largest and oldest company in the neighborhood is the Shenandoah Life Insurance Company. Located on a 27.5-acre semi-wooded tract of land, the building and its setting lend to the visual appeal of the neighborhood. The original business opened in downtown Roanoke in 1916 to provide a "home-town" insurance company to western Virginia. Civic leader Robert Angell served as its first president until his death in 1933, when E. Lee Trinkle, a former governor of Virginia, took over as president. In 1943, the company purchased the land and shortly after WWII, built their modified Georgian style brick office building overlooking a sloping hill. The building has expanded and been remodeled over the years to meet new needs.

Brambleton Avenue

Brambleton Avenue contains virtually every type of development except industrial. It features a large church, three large office buildings, a historic restaurant and filling station, auto sales, single-family bungalows, multifamily houses, one-story commercial stores, a gas station, and a produce stand. With all the available shopping options, there are few sidewalks to provide safe pedestrian passage. Asphalt surrounds the businesses, especially along the north side of Brambleton Avenue. The lack of sidewalks and street trees makes the business area more auto-oriented. The commercial area needs to be a part of the neighborhood to make it pedestrian friendly, accessible, and attractive.



Previously known as Greenbrier Road (and earlier, Martin's Lane), Brambleton Avenue today remains two lanes until it reaches the Roanoke County line where it expands to four lanes. In 1932, the section of Greenbrier Road that ran through Grandin Court was developed into U.S. Route 221. One of the first establishments to take advantage of the new road was the 1936 Coffee Pot Restaurant and its adjacent filling station. This popular roadside destination for travelers originally served as a teahouse. Steam emanated from the spout of the three-dimensional coffeepot sign. The vertical unhewn log building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1996 and still provides entertainment for locals and travelers alike.



Detail of the Coffee Pot Restaurant's coffee pot



A classic 1950s business sign from a Brambleton Avenue shop



An office complex on Brambleton and Spring Avenue

The commercial area of Brambleton Avenue developed over time with a variety of buildings and uses. Much of the street still contains single-family dwellings. Additionally, many of the brick commercial/office buildings that line the north side of the street were originally 1950s and 1960s single-family houses and later converted to commercial use. Most stores are one-story, with inconsistent setback lines with different roof shapes, signage, and uses. Anchoring the commercial sector on the eastern boundary is a cluster of two-story brick office buildings in a neo Colonial-Revival style. Typical businesses include a barber-shop, used car dealership, video store, cell phone store, insurance company, pizza delivery, and a dry cleaner. At the neighborhood meetings, the residents stressed that this commercial area needs beautification and traffic calming, and that this concentrated commercial area should not expand along Brambleton Avenue.



An example of one of the many houses that were converted to businesses along Brambleton Avenue.

Village Centers



1936 Coffee Pot Restaurant

The original core business area of Grandin Court developed during the 1940s and 1950s at the corner of Brambleton Avenue and Ashby Street. This corner contains the only concentration of historic commercial buildings that resemble a traditional commercial style. Today, the three historic buildings (intact buildings 50-years of age or older) consist of the original 1936 Coffee Pot Restaurant, an adjacent used-car dealership that originally served as the 1952 Farris Atlantic Service Station, and a 1951, two-story brick commercial building that once housed Lipes Pharmacy (later Revco). Better signage, lighting, street trees and street furniture could make this corner a focal point for Grandin Court. Installing utilities underground has been proposed as an option for beautification in village centers throughout the city.



Former Lipes Pharmacy building



*View northeast down Grandin Road
looking towards the Grandin Road Village Center.*

The two parcels that contain a restaurant and a convenience store at the corner of Grandin Road and Guilford Avenue should remain a small village center. Although both sides of Grandin Road have sidewalks, street crossings at corners need to be accented for pedestrian safety. Grandin Road also serves as a commuter route, and special streetscape enhancements at this corner may reduce traffic speed and increase the appeal of the neighborhood. Residents cited concerns about trash and parking in areas adjacent to these businesses.

Economic Development Issues:

- Develop a Village Center at the corner of Grandin Road and Guilford Avenue.
- Redefine and beautify the Brambleton Avenue commercial area as a Village Center.
- Limit expansion of the Guilford/Grandin Village Center.